

Introduction

As a former pastor with 12 years of experience, I feel uniquely qualified to speak on the pressing issue of pastors' mental health. While I never led a mega church, my time shepherding a small congregation was filled with profound challenges that weighed heavily on my mental and emotional well-being. I witnessed tragedies that could leave a lasting impact on anyone's psyche, including the horrifying incident of a man being set on fire by a group of drug dealers. In the Kensington area of Philadelphia, reaching out to law enforcement during the COVID pandemic often felt like calling a disconnected number—either no one answered, or there were excuses for why help couldn't arrive.

Harris Kakoulides, host of the Mr Kakoulides and the Bible podcast

Chapter 01 My journal

There were numerous issues I faced before I ultimately stepped away from pastoring due to circumstances beyond my control. Would I ever pastor again? Yes I would, without thinking twice. While some dates escape my memory, the experiences remain vividly etched in my mind.

The Journey of a Small Church

****442 West Susquehanna Ave, Philadelphia, PA****

From the years of

****2004 - 2011****

After taking over my father's abandoned house, I transformed it into a church. My father had opposed my decision to pastor and wanted to sell the property, which prompted me to move in and prevent that from happening. Following his passing, the building became mine.

One of my most poignant memories is officiating the wedding of a lovely young couple, a moment filled with hope. However, not all experiences were uplifting. I faced threats to my safety and the safety of my congregation. Once, a man offended by one of my sermons plotted to burn my church down with me inside it. Miraculously, as he prepared to pour gasoline, he suffered a heart attack. I was able to call an ambulance, and I accompanied him to the hospital, an experience both terrifying and surreal.

I also took on the responsibility of caring for a young child while his mother was recovering from addiction—an act of compassion that reminded me of the importance of community support. Additionally, I had the honor of preaching at a funeral for a family close to our church, fulfilling a role that felt both sacred and necessary.

The Painful Realities of Pastoral Care

There were heartbreaking moments that tested my resolve. Teenagers confided in us about their abusive stepfather, prompting me to accompany the police to investigate. Despite clear signs of her abuse, the mother denied it, and the police could not intervene. Tragically, not long after, I received

the devastating news that she had been killed by her partner. I was left to comfort her children, one of whom arrived at my door with stitches on her neck, crying out, “Mommy is dead, she got stabbed to death by my stepdad.”

In the aftermath of this tragedy, I was overwhelmed by the blood-stained remnants of violence that filled the home. One daughter lost her grip on reality, alternating between uncontrollable laughter and tears, while one of the sons suffered a severe injury. By God’s grace, we were able to raise funds for the mother’s funeral from the community, a testament to the support and love that still existed despite the horror.

Another profound disappointment came when a woman with children approached me for help, claiming she had no money for groceries. After generously providing her with funds, we discovered her fridge was stocked full of beer instead—a painful betrayal that left me questioning my judgment and the sincerity of those we aimed to help.

Yet, amidst the sorrow and challenges, there were moments of hope. I delivered a powerful sermon accompanied by my late wife’s singing, and a man from the bar next door expressed a desire to embrace faith, only to be pulled back by friends who wanted him to remain in darkness.

Our church faced additional struggles when the bar owner next door vandalized one of our member’s cars during service. This left me feeling as though nothing would go right in our ministry, leading to deep-seated feelings of failure and fear for my congregation’s safety. Nonetheless, I persevered, driven by a calling that I felt compelled to fulfill, even as I grappled with the silence of God in the midst of turmoil.

Despite the difficulties, there were breakthroughs. The nephew of the bar owner, a Muslim, became a Christian after spending time with us, and his son was presented to the Lord in our church. This joy was often overshadowed by the financial strain of fines incurred due to the bar patrons leaving their bottles in our trash, which put further pressure on our already limited resources.

Yet, time and again, God provided for my late wife and me through food banks, my mother, and other pastors in the community. Each instance of support reminded me that even in the darkness, there were glimmers of hope.

****Diary Entry: Reflections on Trials and Faith****

Today, I find myself grappling with a whirlwind of memories, each one a testament to the tumultuous journey of my faith and mental well-being. It seems like a lifetime ago, yet the events remain etched in my heart and mind.

There were moments when I felt compelled to refuse performing weddings—two occasions stand out starkly. The first involved a couple with a staggering age difference of at least 50 years. It felt wrong, almost predatory. The second was even more troubling: a union born not of love, but of convenience, as one partner was an undocumented migrant seeking a way to stay in the country. It was a painful decision, but I knew it wasn’t genuine.

In the midst of these challenges, I faced hostility from the outside world. I yelled at a drunkard for urinating in front of my church, only to be met with threats. He even vandalized the church wall, declaring he would get me. Another man, equally intoxicated, broke my mailbox and hurled curses at me and my faith. I tried to reach him, urging him to repent and turn to Jesus, but he responded with anger, declaring his allegiance to a different faith of Islam.

Then there was the day two armed drug dealers confronted my late wife and me. They were brazenly selling drugs on our church's steps. In a moment of desperation, I lifted my Bible and began to rebuke them. To my astonishment, I witnessed a transformation. One fled in fear, while the other broke down in tears, apologizing for his actions. It felt surreal—like a scene from a movie, a reminder that miracles do happen.

Eventually, I made the difficult decision to stop pastoring. We moved to a new location, and it broke my heart to close the church I had poured my soul into. My late wife's wishes took precedence, so we rented a house instead. Years later, the bar owner next door succumbed to cancer, a stark reminder of life's fragility.

****341 East Tusculum Street****

****2012-2015****

Internally, I was wrestling with demons of my own—lust, pride in my biblical knowledge, anger, and envy. Other churches, filled with congregants, thrived despite being doctrinally unsound. Meanwhile, my church, which I nurtured with sound teaching from Genesis to Revelation, saw many come and go, often leaving without understanding the depth of the message.

Arguments with my wife intensified as I sought to reignite church services in our rented home. The landlord graciously allowed it, but the tension was palpable. I encountered a former church member who had left us for a cult, the Jehovah's Witnesses. I regretted not having been firmer in teaching the doctrine of the Trinity. I had once taught it passionately, but perhaps I needed to emphasize it more for those who struggled with understanding.

Then came the harrowing encounter with a motorcycle gang. They attempted to run my wife and me down, shooting as they rode. I felt utterly powerless as I pulled her close, dodging their onslaught. I froze for a moment, overwhelmed, until my wife's urgent voice snapped me back to reality, urging us to escape.

In a bittersweet turn of events, my stepson's friends came to faith, and I was overjoyed to baptize them. However, shortly after, my wife and her son pressured me to resign from pastoring them. It felt like a betrayal, a loss of purpose. To compound the tragedy, our neighbor burned his house down for insurance money, and our rented home—which had become a sanctuary—was engulfed in flames. Miraculously, the area where we held church services remained untouched, but the loss felt devastating.

Through every trial and tribulation, I have wrestled with my faith, my calling, and my mental health. Each entry in this diary serves as a reminder of the struggles I've faced and the resilience I continue to build. I cling to hope, even amidst the chaos, trusting that there is a greater purpose in all these

experiences.

****3004 Ruth St, Philadelphia, PA****

After the death of my wife to cancer, I resumed my calling as a pastor.

****July 15, 2021****

At 11 PM, I felt a strong prompting from the Lord to open my door, but I found myself arguing against it. When I finally opened the door, I was confronted by a man wielding a machete. Despite my fear, I heard that inner voice urging me to invite him in and offer him something to eat. The thought seemed absurd—this man could harm me—but I chose to listen. I asked him, “Hey buddy, are you hungry? Do you want something to eat?” He replied, “I’m starving.” As I fed him, I shared the gospel, and he accepted Christ. Afterward, he checked into a rehab facility. The next morning, his ex-girlfriend, outraged by his change, left a large pile of human feces on my steps.

****August 24, 2021****

I participated in a church service at McPherson Park alongside several other congregations. There, I met a man in a red coat who asked me to wait for him for five minutes while he prepared to turn himself in for detox. I waited, but he never returned. As I searched for him, I encountered four other individuals in red coats who also went to rehab.

****August 30, 2021****

A drug dealer attempted to run me over with his motorcycle right outside my home. Fear immobilized me, and I couldn't move. Perhaps he was one of the motorcyclists who had tried to harm us before, which explained his laughter as he sped away. Weeks later, I learned he was shot dead. This incident triggered memories of my life with my late wife.

****October 20, 2021****

While walking home, an addict called out to me. I initially pretended not to hear him, anticipating a request for money. But when he said, “Pastor,” my heart sank, and I couldn't ignore him. I recognized him; his face was battered, with missing teeth, no shoes, and he was visibly shaking. I gave him my hoodie, and he told me he had been mugged and was hungry. I took him to a nearby place to eat, as we were a distance from my house church.

****December 15, 2021****

I had almost forgotten this incident until now. I found an elderly man, around 90 years old, lying on the ground and unable to move, his shirt stained with blood. I called for an ambulance and stayed with him until help arrived, at the corner of Kensington and Indiana, across from McPherson Park.

****December 21, 2021****

Several churches and I were asked to leave McPherson Park while we were feeding addicts. It was disheartening to see churches kicked out for helping those in need, while drug dealers operated freely. We moved to Kensington and Allegheny, where we were told we had only ten minutes to distribute food. We ended up staying for an hour and a half—praise the Lord! One addict shared that staying on drugs might help him secure housing faster than if he were clean, due to the application process for shelters.

****January 6, 2022****

Just steps away from my rented house and house church, three drug dealers were shot. About a month prior, I had to perform chest compressions on a woman who was overdosing right outside my home. Where was the Mayor during all of this? It felt like nothing was being done about the crisis in Kensington.

****January 15, 2022****

An addict knocked on my door at 10 PM. When I opened it, I saw he had two broken fingers and a busted rib; he had been mugged during the day and fell unconscious after being struck with a stick. Once he regained consciousness, he knew to come to my house church for help. We fed him, and the ambulance took him to the hospital.

****March 1, 2022****

I was scammed by my landlord and had to step down as a pastor.

****April 1, 2022****

I found an elderly man who had overdosed. Thankfully, I had Narcan nasal spray on hand, and by the grace of God, I was able to revive him until the ambulance arrived.

****March 18, 2023****

I began pastoring again at a church called Tabernacle of Love, which generously allowed me to use their building for Saturday services at 3 PM, located at 2033 East Allegheny Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19133. The service is offered in both Spanish and English. Saturday was the only day available, and the Bishop kindly let me use the building rent-free.

****June 3, 2023****

I encountered another elderly man who had overdosed, lying on top of a garbage bag with a bleeding nose and unresponsive. I used the Narcan nasal spray, and he woke up. I'm cautious about using Narcan, as some addicts react violently once they realize they can't get high for the day.

****August 2023****

I performed chest compressions on a young man who was overdosing and turning purple. Despite giving him four doses of Narcan, it didn't work. A bystander poured water on him, and I continued to

administer chest compressions until he finally revived. It was a true team effort—praise God!

Later, the same Bishop relocated my church to a different venue. Initially, I had a fondness for him, but my perspective changed when he attempted to flirt with a woman from the congregation, despite being a married man.

Brother in the church stole the church's funds of 4,000 dollars. This caused me anger, a feeling of betrayal. He went to visit the house and stood there over 4 hours in that time he went to the bathroom twice. In this house to go to the bathroom one has to go through the bathroom. And it was there in one of those trips he stole the money.

Conclusion of the chapter

Reflecting on these experiences, I am reminded of the immense weight that pastors carry—often alone—while serving their communities. The emotional toll of witnessing suffering, betrayal, and loss can be overwhelming. It is crucial for pastors to prioritize their mental health, seek support, and cultivate resilience amidst the challenges of ministry. In sharing my story, I hope to shed light on the importance of mental health within pastoral care and encourage other pastors to seek the help they need.

Chapter 02 other issues Pastor faces

Side Notes and references on issues Pastor faces :

1. **Mental Health Challenges**: Many studies indicate that pastors experience high levels of stress, burnout, and mental health issues. A survey by the Barna Group found that in 2021, around 29% of pastors reported that they had seriously considered quitting their ministry positions in the past year due to stress and emotional exhaustion.
2. **Reasons for Leaving**: Common reasons cited by pastors who leave ministry include:
 - Burnout and emotional exhaustion
 - Isolation and lack of support
 - Conflicts within the church
 - Financial pressures
 - Personal crises or family issues
3. **Statistics**: Research from various organizations, such as Lifeway Research, has shown that According to a survey conducted in 2021, it was found that **38% of pastors** have considered leaving full-time ministry within the past year due to feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated.
4. **Support Systems**: Studies emphasize the importance of support systems, including mentorship, peer support, and mental health resources, in helping pastors cope with the pressures of ministry.
5. **Resilience and Recovery**: Some surveys indicate that those who seek counseling especially if

it is Christian counseling which is done with a Biblical perspective or engage in self-care practices are more likely to remain in ministry and recover from burnout.

6. Quitting in ministry should never be a objection but many take that rode.

As Christians we need to carry one another's burdens , share , pray, and fellowship with other pastors .

****Galatians 6:2 NET** Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Understand that suffering is a must to mature in the work.

2Timothy 2:3 NET Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

7.** There have been several well-known pastors and Ministers who have stepped down from their ministries due to various personal, moral, or theological issues. Here are a few examples, along with relevant quotes or references regarding their situations:

A. ****Ted Haggard****: A prominent pastor and founder of St. James Church in Colorado Springs, Ted Haggard resigned in 2006 after allegations of drug use and sexual misconduct. He stated, "I am a sinner. I'm a man. I'm a human being. I've made mistakes." His fall from grace was widely covered in the media and led to significant discussions about accountability in ministry.

B. ****Mark Driscoll****: The founder of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Driscoll resigned in 2014 amid allegations of bullying, authoritarian leadership, and other controversies. In his resignation statement, he wrote, "I have been unrepentant and prideful, and I have hurt people, and I have hurt my family." His departure prompted a broader conversation about church culture and leadership accountability.

C. ****Bill Hybels****: The founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, Hybels stepped down in 2018 after allegations of inappropriate conduct. He stated, "I have spent my entire adult life building a reputation that I hope reflects my character. I am deeply saddened that my reputation has been tarnished." His resignation raised questions about the impact of leadership and the importance of integrity in ministry.

D. ****Ravi Zacharias****: Although not a pastor in the traditional sense, the late Ravi Zacharias was a well-known Christian apologist whose ministry faced serious allegations of sexual misconduct after his death in 2020. The board of his ministry acknowledged, "We are devastated by the revelations of Ravi's misconduct and the failure of our organization to investigate reports that were made." His situation has sparked discussions about accountability and transparency in Christian leadership.

E. ****Brian Houston****: The founder of Hillsong Church, Brian Houston faced scrutiny and stepped down from his role in 2022 following allegations of misconduct. He stated, "I have to take time to reflect on my role and responsibility." His resignation highlights the challenges and pressures faced by church leaders.

8.**The phenomenon of pastors leaving ministry due to burnout, loss of faith, or other issues has

been documented across various Christian denominations, including Reformed, Baptist, and Pentecostal circles. Here are some references and examples:

Reformed Circles

- A. ****Joshua Harris**** - Former pastor of Covenant Life Church and author of "I Kissed Dating Goodbye," Harris announced his departure from faith in 2019 and has since distanced himself from his former beliefs.
- B. ****Carl Lentz**** - Although primarily associated with the Hillsong Church (which has Reformed influences), Lentz was the lead pastor of Hillsong NYC and faced moral failure, leading to his departure from ministry in 2020.
- C. ****Mike Cosper**** - A former pastor in the Reformed tradition, Cosper has written about the challenges of ministry and the struggles that lead to burnout in his book "Faith Among the Faithless."

Baptist Circles

- A. ****Rob Bell (Was mentioned before)**** - Former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, Bell has shifted away from traditional evangelical beliefs and has been open about his struggles with faith and the pressures of ministry.
- B. ****Josh McDowell**** - While not a pastor in the traditional sense, McDowell has spoken about the burnout he experienced during his ministry and the resulting struggles with faith.
- C. ****Megan Phelps-Roper**** - While not a pastor, Phelps-Roper was raised in the Westboro Baptist Church and has since left the church and shared her journey of faith deconstruction.

Pentecostal Circles

- A. ****Frank Viola**** - A former pastor turned author, Viola has often discussed the stress and burnout associated with pastoral ministry and has critiqued traditional church models.
- B. ****Robby Gallaty**** - While Gallaty has not left the faith, he has been open about his struggles with burnout and the pressures of leading a growing church.
- C. ****John Piper**** - Although still active in ministry, Piper has spoken candidly about the toll that pastoral ministry can take and the burnout that many leaders experience.

General Observations

- ****Burnout****: Many pastors across denominations have spoken about the risk of burnout, often citing unmanageable workloads, unrealistic expectations, and the emotional toll of ministry.
- ****Loss of Faith****: Various ministries and blogs (e.g., "The Christian Post," "The Gospel Coalition") feature stories and testimonials from pastors who have deconstructed their faith or left the church entirely. This is why it is good to go back to the foundation of Christianity and study Apologetics as a defense for the faith, not only for your congregation but for yourself especially when doubts come into mind.

- **Online Communities**: Platforms like Reddit (e.g., r/exchristian, r/Christianity) and blogs often feature personal stories from former pastors discussing their journeys out of ministry and their struggles with faith.

These references reflect a broader trend of pastors grappling with the challenges of ministry, leading some to step away from their roles or even from their faith entirely.

Other surveys and studies on pastors who have left the ministry:

1. **Barna Group's 2019 Study**: "State of Pastors" report, which found that 1 in 5 pastors (21%) have considered quitting full-time ministry in the past year. [1]
2. **LifeWay Research's 2015 Study**: "Pastor Perspectives" survey, which reported that 54% of pastors have considered quitting ministry at some point. [2]
3. **Focus on the Family's 2018 Study**: "Pastor's Wives Survey" found that 61% of pastor's wives reported that their husband had considered leaving the ministry. [3]
4. **Schaeffer Institute's 2013 Study**: "Why Pastors Leave the Ministry" survey, which identified top reasons for leaving, including burnout, conflict, and lack of support. [4]
5. **The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development's 2018 Study**: "The Reasons Why Pastors Leave the Ministry" survey, which found that 40% of pastors leave due to burnout, 25% due to conflict, and 15% due to moral issues. [5]

These studies provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by pastors and the reasons why some choose to leave the ministry.

References:

[1] Barna Group. (2019). State of Pastors.

[2] LifeWay Research. (2015). Pastor Perspectives.

[3] Focus on the Family. (2018). Pastor's Wives Survey.

[4] Schaeffer Institute. (2013). Why Pastors Leave the Ministry.

[5] The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development. (2018). The Reasons Why Pastors Leave the Ministry.

The need for pastors to take care of the marriages is urgent you look at some other surveys that are not really nice to look at.

1. **Barna Group's 2018 Study**: "State of Pastors" report, which found that 1 in 10 pastors (11%)

have experienced divorce. [1]

2. _LifeWay Research's 2015 Study_: "Pastor's Wives Survey" reported that 7% of pastor's wives had experienced divorce. However, a separate LifeWay Research study from 2015 found that 25% of pastors had experienced divorce or were currently separated. [2][3]

3. _Focus on the Family's 2012 Study_: "Pastor's Family Survey" found that 13% of pastors reported having experienced divorce. [4]

4. _The Schaeffer Institute's 2013 Study_: "Why Pastors Leave the Ministry" survey, which identified marital problems as one of the top reasons for leaving the ministry. While not exclusively focused on divorce, the study highlights the challenges pastors face in their marriages. [5]

5. _Hoge and Wenger's 2005 Study_: "Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry" reported that 15% of pastors who left the ministry cited marital problems as a reason. [6]

These studies provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by pastors and their spouses, including the risk of divorce.

References:

[1] Barna Group. (2018). State of Pastors.

[2] LifeWay Research. (2015). Pastor's Wives Survey.

[3] LifeWay Research. (2015). Pastor's Study.

[4] Focus on the Family. (2012). Pastor's Family Survey.

[5] Schaeffer Institute. (2013). Why Pastors Leave the Ministry.

[6] Hoge, D. R., & Wenger, J. (2005). Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry.

Porn is also a issue which Pastor's face

Here are some references to surveys and studies on pastors struggling with pornography addiction:

1. _Barna Group's 2016 Study_: "The Porn Phenomenon" report, which found that 57% of pastors and 64% of youth pastors admitted to having struggled with pornography, either currently or in the past. [1]

2. _Focus on the Family's 2018 Study_: "Pastor's and Pornography" survey, which reported that 55% of pastors had viewed pornography within the past year. [2]

3. _The National Association of Church Business Administration's (NACBA) 2015 Study_: "Pastor's and Pornography" survey, which found that 63% of pastors had viewed pornography at some point in

their ministry. [3]

4. _Covenant Eyes' 2014 Study_: "Pastor's and Pornography" survey, which reported that 53% of pastors had viewed pornography in the past year, and 18% had viewed it within the past week. [4]

5. _The Christian Ministry Resources' (CMR) 2013 Study_: "Pastor's and Pornography" survey, which found that 50% of pastors had viewed pornography at some point in their ministry. [5]

These studies provide valuable insights into the struggles faced by pastors regarding pornography addiction.

References:

[1] Barna Group. (2016). The Porn Phenomenon.

[2] Focus on the Family. (2018). Pastor's and Pornography.

[3] National Association of Church Business Administration. (2015). Pastor's and Pornography.

[4] Covenant Eyes. (2014). Pastor's and Pornography.

[5] Christian Ministry Resources. (2013). Pastor's and Pornography.

Chapter 03 Closing thoughts on the whole ordeal

Here are some closing thoughts:

Pastors, like anyone else, are not immune to struggles. They face the same challenges, temptations, and weaknesses as the average person. The misconception that pastors are somehow superhuman or more spiritually resilient can lead to unrealistic expectations and a lack of support.

The reality is that pastors are humans with the same simple nature as everyone else.

1Peter 5:9 NET Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering.

1Corinthians 10:13 NET No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.

They have their own strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. The pressures of ministry, combined with the weight of responsibility for their congregation, can take a toll on their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

It's essential to recognize that pastors need support, care, and compassion, just like anyone else. By acknowledging their humanity and the challenges they face, we can work to create a more

supportive and understanding environment for them.

Ultimately, the struggles of pastors serve as a reminder that we are all in this together. We all face challenges, and we all need support and care. By acknowledging our shared humanity, we can work towards creating a more compassionate and supportive community for everyone including pastors .